

Monday, March 12, 2007

Eastern loop construction set for 2011

By Taft Wireback
Staff Writer
News-Record.com

Fast Forward's recent update of state highway projects in the Triad attracted a veritable avalanche of reader interest, along with several inquiries evincing a deep thirst for additional knowledge.

OK, it was three e-mails. But they all dealt with various aspects of Greensboro's Urban Loop.

So here goes, starting with the answer to Writer No. 1's question: Fast Forward is not in the business of selling land or buildings, so we can't provide any guidance on how the loop might affect your property values. We suggest you consult a reputable real-estate broker.

Writer No. 2 noted Fast Forward's update on the loop ended with the part being built near Piedmont Triad International Airport. She wondered about the rest of the loop, from there to U.S. 70 east of town.

A big chunk of the remainder is scheduled for completion in the early 2010s, from U.S. 70 to U.S. 29.

That section had fallen into limbo until recently. With the help of a well-placed local resident -- state Board of Transportation Chairman Doug Galyon -- Greensboro officials were able to resurrect it in the latest statewide highway plan.

That northeastern section of the loop is scheduled for land acquisition in 2009, followed by construction beginning in 2011 at an estimated cost of \$117 million.

The news isn't so hot for the final two segments: U.S. 29 west to Lawndale Drive (\$86.5 million, land and construction) and Lawndale to Bryan Boulevard (\$206 million).

Both sections remain unscheduled, meaning no money has been set aside for them. Thus, there is no clear answer as to when they will be built.

Writer No. 2 also wondered what happened to the loop's original name, Painter Boulevard, after P.C. Painter, the first Greensboro city manager. "Urban Loop" or "Outer Loop" sound so prosaic, this writer suggested.

Urban Loop is its official name as a state Department of Transportation project, said Mike Mills, division engineer for the Greensboro area. It was dubbed Painter Boulevard when conceived as a city project many years ago.

But for much of the road's course around Greensboro, people will know it as neither Painter nor loop; a lot of it will simply be Interstate 40 or I-85/40.

Fleming Road was the issue that concerned Writer No. 3, who wondered whether the segment of the loop that ends at PTI will tie into Fleming.

Mills said the loop won't be carried that far.

It will go only far enough past Bryan Boulevard to build exit ramps for traffic moving between Bryan and the loop, he said.

I-73 on the way

Speaking of superhighways and the loop, Triad residents should know in a few months which route fledgling Interstate 73 will take around Greensboro.

Four options are under consideration.

One of them is likely to be recommended by June or July, Mills said.

The new interstate will follow existing U.S. 220 into the Summerfield area, where it will either turn southwest on a new route called the N.C. 68 connector or continue along U.S. 220 into northern Greensboro.

The U.S. 220 alternative probably won't be selected because it cuts through Greensboro's water-supply lakes, raising all sorts of environmental issues.

Other options include tracking existing N.C. 68 to merge with I-40 just west of PTI or using one of several routes to link with Greensboro's Urban Loop and take that around town.

The project is only in its planning stage but someday will bring a third interstate into Guilford County and link Greensboro with the Midwest.

New paint

At its March meeting, the N.C. Board of Transportation voted to spend \$3.1 million to clean and paint six bridges that cross Business 85 in Greensboro.

It sounds like a lot to make a few bridges nice and shiny, but transportation experts say regular cleaning and painting adds years of productive life to bridges by helping them resist rust and other types of deterioration that ultimately erode even the sturdiest structure.

The bridges are located on U.S. 220 and Creek Ridge, Rehobeth Church, Groometown and Holden roads. The job went to VHP Enterprises of Tarpon Springs, Fla., which expects to begin work this spring.

Promoting the coast

Fast Forward usually deals with transportation for "land lubbers," but the N.C. DOT knows there's more than one way to travel some parts of the state.

DOT joins the state Wildlife Resources Commission every year in publishing the Coastal Boating Guide, available for the asking by boaters looking for the skinny on navigating the coastline.

The guide includes a complete list of marinas and boatyards with services available at each. It also features information on fishing tournaments, natural resources and other places of interest along the way.

The Beaufort area near the Atlantic Beach Bridge is showcased on the cover.

To get a copy, call (877) DOT-4YOU or visit www.ncdot.org/maps.

Copies also are available by writing N.C. DOT's Customer Service Office at 1503 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699.

Have a question you want answered or need to vent about transportation issues? Send them to fastforward@news-record.com. Be sure to leave your name and a way for us to get in touch with you.